

Response to the Synod



Lev Tolstoy

Response to the Synod and to the Letters Received in Regards to Their Edict

By Lev Tolstoy

The following is Lev Tolstoy's response to "The Resolution of Their Holiness Synod in Regards to Leo Tolstoy, February 20-22, 1901".

At first I did not want to reply to the Synod's Edict about me but it has caused too many responses in writing, in which unknown to me correspondents:

- some - scolded me for rejecting things I've never rejected;
- others - urged me to believe in things I didn't stop believing;
- and the third ones - expressed solidarity with me, which barely exists in reality, and sympathy to which I hardly entitled.

So I have decided to reply to both: the edict itself, to indicate what is unjust in it, and to the appeals to me by the correspondents unknown to me.

In general, the Edict of the Synod has many defects. It is either illegitimate or intentionally equivocal; it is arbitrary, unfounded, untruthful, and besides, it contains false allegations and incites to evil feelings and deeds.

1. It is illegitimate or intentionally equivocal; for if it is intended to be an Excommunication from Church, it fails to conform the Church's regulations on which such an Excommunication is supposed to be based on; and if it is merely an announcement of the fact that someone who does not believe in Church and its dogmas does not belong to the Church, then it is self-evident; and so such an announcement can have no other purpose rather than, while it does not qualify as an Excommunication, it creates an appearance of such, because that is how the Edict has been

perceived.

2. It is arbitrary, for it accuses me alone of disbelief in all the points enumerated in the Edict; whereas many, in fact almost all educated people, share the same disbelief and have constantly expressed and still express it in conversations, in lectures, in pamphlets, and in books.
3. It is unfounded because it names the main reason for its release the large distribution of the false teaching wherewith I pervert people — whereas I am well aware that there are hardly a hundred people who share my views, and the distribution of my writings on religion, thanks to the censorship, is so negligible that the majority of people who have read the Synod's Edict have no a tiniest idea of what I may have written about religion, as it is apparent from the letters I have received.
4. It contains the obvious untruth, by asserting that the Church made efforts to reason me, which did not bring success, although nothing of this kind has ever taken place.
5. It represents what is, in juridical terminology, called false accusation, for it contains assertions that are deliberately unjust and implying my harm.
6. And finally, it incites evil feelings and actions, because, as expected, it caused in uneducated and unreasoning people anger and hatred toward me, culminating in the threats of murder expressed in the letters I received. *"Now you have been cursed, and after your death you will be put to everlasting torments, and will expire like a dog... anathema, you, an old devil... be damned,"* one writes. Another blames government for not having, as yet, locked me up in a monastery, and fills his letter with foul language. A third one writes: *"If government won't get rid of you, we ourselves will make you shut your mouth,"* and the letter ends with curses. *"To destroy you, a scoundrel,"* writes the fourth, *"I shall find means..."* and follows that with inappropriate swearing. Similar signs of anger toward me, incited by the Synod's Edict, I also see when I meet some people in person. On that very day, February 25, when the Edict was published, while crossing a public square, I heard the words toward me: *"This is a devil in human form,"* and had the

crowd been composed of other people, it'd be very likely that they would beat me, as several years ago a man at the Panteleymon Chapel was beaten.

So, overall, the Synod's Edict is pretty nasty; and the statement at the end saying that those who sign it pray that I may become such as they are, does not make it any better.

That is in general; and in details, this Edict is unjust in the following. It is said in the Edict: *"A writer, well known to the world, Russian by birth, initiated and raised as Orthodox, count Tolstoy, under the seduction of his intellectual pride has insolently risen against the Lord, and against his Christ, and against his holy heritage, and has publicly, in the sight of all men, renounced the Orthodox Mother Church that nurtured and educated him."*

The fact I have renounced the Church that calls itself Orthodox is perfectly correct.

But I have renounced it not because I had risen against the Lord, but, on the contrary, only because with all the strengths of my soul I wished to serve him. Before the renunciation of the Church, and of the communion with people which was inexpressibly dear to me, I — having found some reasons to doubt the Church's accuracy — devoted several years to the investigation of its teaching, both theoretically and practically. In terms of the theory, I have read all I could about the Church's doctrine, have learned and critically analyzed the dogmatic theology; and as of practice - for over a year I followed strictly all the injunctions of the Church, including going on all the fasts and attending all the Church's services. And I became convinced that in the theory of the Church doctrine is a crafty and harmful lie, and on practice it represents a collection of the grossest superstitions and sorcery, which completely conceals the whole meaning of Christ's teaching.

(It's enough to read the Prayer-Book, and observe the rituals that are nonstop performed by the Orthodox priests and which is considered the Christian worship of God, to realize that all these ceremonies are nothing but various

types of sorcery, adapted to each life occasion. For example, for a child to go to Paradise in case of its death, you need to hurry to oil the child and to immerse it into water while pronouncing certain words; in order for a mother, after giving birth of a child, to cease to be unclean, certain incantations have to be pronounced; to have a success in one's affairs, to live comfortably in a new house, for wheat to grow well, for drought to cease, to recover from sickness, for the dying person to alleviate his circumstances in the next world, — for all these and a thousand other situations there are certain incantations which, at a certain place, for certain recompense, are uttered by the priest.

And, indeed, I have repudiated the Church, ceased to observe its ceremonies, and wrote a will instructing those close to me, so that when I die they should not let any Church representatives near me, and put my dead body away as quickly as possible — without any incantations or prayers over it — just as one puts away any disgusting and useless object, so that it does not incommode the living ones.

As to the statements that I “*devote my literary activity and the talent given to me by God, to disseminating among people of the teachings contrary to Christ and to the Church,*” etc., and that, “*in the great amount of my works and letters distributed by me and by my followers all over the world, especially within the borders of our dear fatherland, I preach, with the zeal of a fanatic, the overthrow of all the dogmas of the Orthodox Church and the very essence of the Christian faith*” — this is not true. I never troubled myself about the propagation of my teaching. It is true that for myself I have expressed my understanding of Christ's teaching in writing, and did not hide these writings from people who wished to become acquainted with them, but I never published them myself. And I only told people about how I understand the Christ's teaching when they asked me about it. To those people I told what I think, and gave out my books when I had them.

Then it is said that “*I deny God worshiped in the holy trinity, the creator and designer of the universe; I deny Lord Jesus Christ, God-man, redeemer and savior of the world, who suffered for us men and for our salvation, and was raised from the dead; I deny the immaculate human conception of the Lord*

Christ, and the virginity, both before his birth and after his birth, of the Most Pure Mother of God.” In regards that I deny the incomprehensible trinity and, having no meaning in our times, the fable of the fall of the first man, as well as the *blasphemous story of a God being born of a virgin to redeem the human race* — that is perfectly true. But God – Spirit, God – love, the only God — the source of all, I not only do not deny, but I do not consider anything really existing except God, and I see the whole meaning of life only in fulfillment of his will, expressed in the Christian teaching.

It is also said: “*He does not acknowledge afterlife and retribution beyond the grave.*” If one understands afterlife as *the Second Advent, a hell with eternal torments, devils, and a paradise of perpetual happiness* — it is perfectly true that I do not acknowledge such afterlife; but the eternal life and retribution here and everywhere, now and always, I acknowledge to such an extent that, standing now, at my age, on the verge of my grave, I often have to make an effort to restrain myself from desiring of my carnal death — that is, of the birth to a new life; and I believe every good action increases the true well-being of my eternal life, and every evil action decreases it.

It is also stated that I deny all the Sacraments. That is absolutely true. I consider all the Sacraments to be crude, degrading sorcery, incompatible with the idea of God or with the Christian teaching, and also an infringement of the very direct commandments of the Gospel. In the baptism of infants I see a the perversion of the whole meaning which might be attached to the baptism of adults consciously accepting Christianity; in the performance of the sacrament of marriage over people who have had liaisons before, in the allowing of divorce, and in the consecration of the marriages of the divorced, I see a direct infringement of both the meaning and the words of the Gospel teaching.

In the periodical absolution of sins via confessions I see a harmful deception, which only encourages immorality and eliminates fear of sinning.

Both in Extreme Unction and in Anointing I see methods of gross sorcery — just as in the worship of icons and relics, and in all the rites, prayers, and exorcisms which fill the Prayer-Book. In the Sacrament I see a deification of

the flesh and a perversion of Christian teaching. In Ordination I see (aside from the obvious preparation for deception) a direct infringement of the words of Jesus who clearly forbid to call anyone teacher, father, or master. (*Mathew XXIII, 8-10*).

Finally, the last and the greatest of my sins is named the fact that I, “having *reviled the most sacred objects of the faith, has not shrunk from subjecting to derision the greatest of sacraments, the Holy Eucharist.*” The fact I did not shrink from describing simply and objectively what the priest does when he prepares this so-called sacrament is perfectly true; but that this so-called sacrament is anything holy, and that to describe it simply, just as it is performed, is blasphemy, is quite untrue. It is not blasphemy to call a dividing wall as a dividing wall and not an iconostasis, and a cup as a cup and not a chalice, etc.; but it is a most terrible, continual, and revolting blasphemy that people (by use of all possible means of deception and hypnotization) assure children and simple-minded folk that if bits of bread are cut up in a particular manner while certain words are pronounced over them, and if they are put into wine, then God enters into those bits of bread, and any living person named by the priest when he takes out one of these sops will be healthy, and any dead person named by the priest when he takes out one of these sops will be better off in the other world on that account; and that God himself will enter into the man who eats such a sop. Surely that is terrible!

No matter how each person understands the personality of Christ, his teaching, which destroys evil of the world, and in such simple, easy, and undoubted way brings people well-being if only they do not pervert it, this teaching is all hidden, all transformed into a gross sorcery of washings, oiling, gesturing, exorcisms, eating of bits of bread, etc., so that nothing remains of the true teaching. And if, at any time, someone tries to remind people that Christ’s teaching consists not in this sorcery, not in public prayers, liturgies, candles, and icons, but in loving one another, in not returning evil for evil, in not suing or killing one another — the moaning of those to whom the deception is profitable is aroused, and these people, with incomprehensible audacity, publicly declare in churches, print in books, newspapers, and catechisms, *that Christ has never forbade oaths* (swearing allegiance, or swearing in courts of law), *never forbade murder* (executions,

wars), and *that the teaching of non-resistance to evil has with Satanic cunning been invented by the enemies of Christ*. (Speech by Ambrosius, Bishop of Kharkof. — L. T.)

What is most terrible is that people to whom it is profitable, not only deceive adults, but (having power to do so) deceive children also — those very children concerning whom Jesus pronounced woe on him who deceives them.

It is terrible that these men, for such petty gains, do such horrible harm, by hiding from people the truth that was revealed by Christ, which gives the well-being that cannot be equated even by thousands times the benefits these men receive from doing that. They act like a robber who kills the whole family of five or six people to get an old coat and ten kopecks in money. People would willingly give him all their clothes and all their money for not to being killed; but he cannot not act otherwise.

It is the same with religious deceivers. It would be worthwhile to agree to keep them in ten times' greater luxury, if only they would refrain from ruining people with their deceptions. But they cannot act differently. That is awful. And, therefore, we not only can but must, expose their deceptions. If there is something truly sacred, it is certainly not what they call Sacraments but this very duty of exposing their religious deception when one detects them.

When a Tchouvash smears his idol with sour cream, or beats it, I can refrain from insulting his faith, and can pass by with equanimity, for he does these things in the name of his own superstition, foreign to me, and he does not interfere with what is holy to me. But when people (however numerous, however ancient their superstitions, and however powerful they may be) in the name of the God by whom I live, and of that teaching of Christ's which has given life to me and is capable of giving life to all people, preach gross sorcery, I cannot see it passively. And if I call what they are doing by its name, I only do what I must do and what I cannot refrain from doing because I believe in God and in the Christian teaching. If they, instead of be horrified at their own *blasphemy*, call the exposing of their imposture *blasphemy*, that only proves the strength of their deception, and must only motivate people

who believe in God and in Christ's teaching to increase efforts to put an end to this deception, hiding the true God from people.

They should say that about Christ — who drove bulls and sheep and dealers from the temple — that he blasphemed. If he would come now and see what is being done in his name in Church, he would surely, with yet greater and most just anger, throw out all these horrible altar-cloths, lances, crosses, and cups, and candles, and icons, and all the things wherewith the priests — carrying on their sorcery — hide God and his teaching from people.

This is what is true and untrue in the Synod's Edict about me. I certainly do not believe in what they say they believe in. But I believe in a lot of what they wish to persuade people that I don't believe in.

I believe in the following: I believe in God, whom I understand as spirit, as love, as the source of all. I believe that he is in me, and I am in him. I believe that the will of God is most clearly and intelligibly expressed in the teaching of a man Christ, whom to consider as God, and pray to, I consider the greatest blasphemy. I believe that man's true well-being lies in the fulfilling of God's will, and his will is that people should love one another, and consequently do to others as they wish others to do to them — as it is said in the Gospel that in this is the law and the prophets.

I believe, therefore, that the meaning of the life of every separate person is only in increasing of love in him; that this increase of love leads each person, even in this life, to ever greater and greater blessedness, and after death gives him the more well-being the more love he has, and also assists, more than anything else, toward the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth: that is, to the establishment of such an order of life in which the discord, deception and violence that now rule will be replaced by free accord, by truth, and by the brotherly love of one for another. I believe that to obtain progress in love there is only one means: prayer — not public prayer in churches, plainly forbidden by Jesus, but private prayer, like the sample given us by Jesus, consisting of the renewing and strengthening in our own consciousness of the meaning of our life and of our complete dependence on the will of God.

Whether these beliefs of mine offend, sadden, or tempt anyone, or hinder anything and anybody, or displease anybody, I can as little change them as I can change my body. I must myself live my own life, and I must myself alone meet death (and very soon), and therefore I cannot believe otherwise than as I — preparing to go to that God from whom I came — do believe.

I am not saying my faith to be the one indubitable truth for all time, but I see no other that is simpler, clearer, and better able to answer the demands of my reason and my heart; if I find such, I shall at once accept it, because God needs nothing but the truth. And I cannot return to that from which, with such suffering, I have escaped, just like a flying bird cannot re-enter the eggshell from which it has emerged.

“He who begins by loving Christianity better than truth, will proceed by loving his own sect or church better than Christianity, and end in loving himself (his own peace) better than all,” said Coleridge.

I went the contrary way. I began by loving my Orthodox faith more than my peace, then I loved Christianity more than my Church, and now I love truth more than anything in the world.

And up to now, truth, for me, corresponds with Christianity as I understand it. And I profess this Christianity; and to the degree in which I profess it I live peacefully and happily, and peacefully and happily approach death.

April 4th, 1901, Moscow

Appendix. Resolution of Their Holiness Synod in Regards to Lev Tolstoy, February 20-22, 1901

The Resolution of Their “Holiness” Synod in Regards to Leo Tolstoy went as following:

“At first The Church of Christ tolerated insults and attacks from numerous heretics and false teachers, who strove to overthrow her and break her essential foundations, built on faith in Christ, son of living God. But all power of hell, according to God’s promise, was not able to overcome the Holy Church, which will be insurmountable for ever.

In our days, with God’s collusion, a new false teacher, Leo Tolstoy, has appeared.

Known to the whole world, Russian by birth, orthodox by christening and his upbringing, count Tolstoy, tempted by his proud intellect, got dare to revolt against the Lord and His Christ and His Holy possession, openly in front of everybody renounced from nursing and upbringing him Mother Orthodox Church, and dedicated his literary activity and given from God talent on spreading among people teachings, opposing Christ and the Church, and on destruction in minds and hearts of people of the fatherly orthodox faith, which established the universe, by which our ancestors lived and salvaged and by which the Holy Russia was supported and fortified.

In his numerous compositions and letters distributed by him and his students across the world, especially within our dear Motherland, he:

1. *Preaches, with jealousy of a fanatic, to overthrow all dogmas of the Orthodox Church and*
2. *The essence of the Christian faith itself*
 1. *Rejects individual living God in holy Trinity glorified, Creator and Doer of the universe*

2. *Denies Lord Jesus Christ as a man-God*
3. *Denies Jesus Christ as a Savior who suffered for us and for our salvation*
4. *Denies Jesus Christ as a Savior of the world*
5. *Denies resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*
6. *Denies that Christ-God child was conceived without seed*
7. *Denies virginity of Virgin Mary until the birth of Christ*
8. *Denies virginity of Virgin Mary after the birth of Christ*
9. *Doesn't recognize afterlife*
10. *Doesn't recognize retribution*
11. *Rejects all MIRACLES of the Church and beneficial effect of Holy Spirit IN THEM*
12. *Dishonors the most holy subjects of orthodox faith,*

Didn't tremble to subject to mockery the greatest of the sacrament, Holy Eucharist.

Count Tolstoy preaches all of this incessantly, by word and writing to enticement and horror of the whole orthodox world, and not even secretly but openly in front of everybody, consciously and intentionally moved away from any communication with the Orthodox Church. Previous attempts to convince him change his mind were unsuccessful. Therefore the Church does not consider him her member and cannot consider, until he repents and resumes his communication with her. This is the certificate of the whole Church to affirm orthodox world and to persuade count Tolstoy himself. Many of his close ones, keepers of faith, to their sorrow think that he, till the end of his days, will live without faith in God and our Lord Savior, rejecting blessings and prayers of the Church and any communication with her.

Therefore, witnessing his departure from the Church, we pray, and let Lord give him repentance and reasoning. We pray: merciful Lord, don't wish death of sinners, hear and have pity, and turn him to your holy Church. Amen."